

## **School Achievement as medium for Inter-generational social mobility between immigrants. A case study**

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### **Abstract:**

This article aims to analyze the role of education and especially of school achievement as a medium for inter-generational social mobility, focusing on the case of Albanian immigrants in Italy. The study was focused on the analyze of school performance and academic achievement of Albanian immigrants of 1.5 generation in correlation with: (a) parents support and educational - occupational aspirations for their children; (b) reaction against stigma toward immigrants; (c) socio-economic status and the professional achievement of Albanian immigrants of 1.5 generation after graduation.

The study showed that Albanian immigrants see especially the high education and school achievement as a medium for upward inter-generational mobility, but there is a gap between school achievements of 1.5 generation of Albanian immigrants and their working sphere and still today many Albanian immigrants of 1.5 generation work in manual works as they parents and the ‘intergenerational transmission of the disadvançe’s from father to son/daughter” has not disappear.

### **Introduction**

This article aims to analyze the role of education as a medium for inter-generational social mobility, focusing on the case of Albanian immigrants in Italy. The 1.5 G referees to those people arrived in the country of destination of their parents when they were 6 to 12 years-old. The experience have shown that this group of immigrants face many difficulties because the process of

socialization that starts in a way in the place of origin, continues in a different way in the country of destination. Experiencing this change, the 1.5G of immigrants face many challenges in order to find their place within the host society contests. Parents project their desires and cultivate their expectations on the future of their children with the aim that their children have better life than themselves in this new country, and usually this is the main reason why they have migrated. In order to make it possible, they push their children to have a good school performance, because they see education as a medium to progress in life.

The first part of this article explains some key concepts and shows some theoretical aspects of inter-generational social mobility between first and 1.5 generation of immigrants. More specifically in this part, some concepts as: social mobility, absolute social mobility, relative social mobility, inter-generation mobility, intra-generation mobility, first generation of immigrants, 1.5 generation of immigrants, second generation of immigrants, have been explained.

The second part consists on the explanation of the methodology used. The study was focused on a qualitative research method. The article presents the results of 42 semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of 14 Albanian immigrant families who live in Italy.

The first part is focusing in the analyze of the study findings. The analyze is focused on school performance and academic achievement of Albanian immigrants of 1.5 generation in correlation with: (a) parents support and educational - occupational aspirations for their children; (b) reaction against stigma toward immigrants; (c) socio-economic status and the professional achievement of Albanian immigrants of 1.5 generation after graduation.

Last some conclusions about the role of high education and school achievement as medium for upward inter-generational mobility between Albanian immigrants, have been presented.

*Inter-generational social mobility between first and 1.5 generation immigrants.*

### *Concepts and theoretical view*

In order to compare the social mobility between first and 1.5 generation immigrants is necessary to clarify the key concepts such as: social mobility, first generation and 1.5 generation of immigrants.

There are several aspects to the definition of social mobility as a concept. Economists tend to measure social mobility in terms of income and sociologists focus primarily on social mobility in terms of occupational. Social mobility is defined as the movement – usually of individuals but sometimes of whole groups – between different positions within the system of social stratification in any society (Aldridge, 2003: 189). The importance of the concept of social mobility as a measure of social fairness has increased, being seen as a measure of equality of opportunity in a world where outcomes are not equal.

Nunn et. al (2007) have been focused on the analyze of different kinds of social mobility. These authors mention that social mobility can be seen in absolute and relative terms. When social mobility occurs in an *absolute manner*, a given society affords the mass of individuals therein with greater opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Absolute social mobility is made possible through advancements within the economic structure of a society. *Relative social mobility* however occurs as a result of progressive intra- and inter-generational advancements to the socio-economic status of an individual or family. Whereas *intra-generational* advancements refer to socio-economic advancement or upward social mobility within a given individual's lifetime; *inter-generational* advancements occur within a given family, but over two or more generations (ibid.)

Looking that the main aim of this article is to analyze the inter-generational mobility, taking the example of the Albanian immigrants in Italy, is important to be focused on the clarification of this kind of the social mobility. Inter-generational mobility, as an important element of social mobility, is based on the time factor. It is a change in status from that which a child began within

the parents, to that of the child upon reaching adulthood. It refers to a change in the status of family members from one generation to the next. It is important because the amount of this mobility in a society tells us to what extent inequalities are passed on from one generation to the next. If there is very little inter-generational mobility, inequality is clearly deeply built into the society for people's life chances are being determined at the moment of birth. When there is a mobility, people are clearly able to achieve new statuses through their own efforts, regardless of the circumstances of their birth (Habil et al, 2008)

Generally speaking, the developed and democratic societies create conditions to motivate skilled people to be part of the upward social mobility. In terms of sociology of migration, this can be a very strong pull factor for people who decided to migrate to the developed countries. But many times the generation of migrants who undertake the migration action face many difficulties and make many sacrifices for their children in order to get more chances and have a better life.

Before analyzing this context, it is necessary to clarify the concept of first and 1.5 generation of immigrants.

A "*first-generation immigrant*" may be someone living permanently in the country without becoming a citizen; descendants of such a person born in the country may automatically be citizens.

The ambiguity of this term extends to the term "*second generation immigrant*," which may refer to the first generation born in the new country. Incidentally, the less common term *1.5 generation* was unambiguously coined to refer to those who immigrate early in life, thus remaining consistent to the notion that "first generation" refers to immigrants themselves, and "second generation" refers to the first generation of a family *born* in the new country.

The sociologist Rubén Rumbaut (1997), distinguishes different kinds of second generations of immigrants depending on the age of arrival in the country of destination of their parents. The generation so called '2G' refers to those children of immigrants who are born in the country in which their parents have emigrated (host country). Then, follows the generation '1.75' which is

constituted of those children of immigrants who arrived in their early childhood in the host country (no later than five years-old) and the generation 1.5 that is constituted of those arrived in the country of destination of their parents when they were 6 to 12 years-old. Finally, he distinguishes the generation 1.25 constituted of all children of immigrants that arrived in the country of destination when they were 13 to 17 years-old (Rumbaut, 1997, p. 950).

Generation labeling of immigrants is further complicated by the fact that immigrant generations may not correspond to the genealogical generations of a family. For instance, if a family of two parents and their two adult children immigrate to a new country, members in both generations of this family may be considered "first generation" by the former definition, as both parents and children were foreign-born, adult, immigrants.

They earn the label the "*1.5 generation*" because they bring with them characteristics from their home country but continue their assimilation and socialization in the new country. Their identity is thus a combination of new and old culture and tradition.

Depending on the age of immigration, the community into which they settle, extent of education in their native country, and other factors, 1.5 generation individuals will identify with their countries of origin to varying degrees. However, their identification will be affected by their experiences growing up in the new country. 1.5G individuals are often bilingual and find it easier to be assimilated into the local culture and society than people who immigrated as adults.

1.5 generation immigrants tend to be fluently bilingual and bicultural, communicate easily between two worlds, and can easily connect to different cultures, approaching the ideal global citizen. Their cultural and language fluidity has even proven to be an advantage in school performance.

Recent researches have been demonstrated that there is a quite a big difference if a person is born in the country in which their parents immigrated (native-born children of immigrants) or if they arrived in a later stage of their lives (1.75 and 1.5 generation).

For those children of immigrants who arrive later on in their lives, the situation completely different. They have to learn the Italian language in order to attend class and to integrate well in the Italian schooling system. Indeed, as Rumbaut points out the language acquisition is a function of age. It is especially good between the ages of three and the early teens, after ten years old there is the risk to speak with an accent (Rumbaut 1999, p. 502). Thus, for non native-born children of immigrants the first years in elementary school are generally remembered as a very stressful period due to the difficulties in understand what has been explained in class and being able to communicate with the other school mates (Bosisio *et al.* 2005).

Educational attainment of children of immigrants is important because:

*[...] in economies where information and skills count, education serves as the ticket of admission to better jobs and political clout. (Lowell and Kemper, 2004).*

### **Study methodology**

This article presents the results of 42 semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of 14 Albanian immigrant families who live in Italy. From 42 interviews 23 were immigrants of first generation (sometimes both husband and wife from the same family have been interviewed) and 19 immigrants of 1.5 generation (children of interviewed parents).

The interviews have been conducted during the period July 2010 – March 2011. From 42 interviewed people, 20 were female and 22 were males. People of first generation of immigrants were from 45 to 65 years old and people from 1.5 G were from 20 to 30 years old.

The interviews were collected by using the technique of snowball, following a semi- structured format by giving to the respondents full allowance for discussion. All interviews were in Albanian. Some people didn't like to be taped during the process of their interviewing, so I wrote down the main points of my conversation with them. The other interview-narratives have been

registered and then taped. They have been collected by a technique of non-representative sampling which tried to capture the diversity of experiences of Albanian first and 1.5 generation of immigrants.

### **Study findings**

As McCarthy has pinpointed, there are different factors that influence school performance and academic achievement of second generation of migrants (McCarthy, 1998, p. 29-30). But it seems that the same factors influence the academic achievement of 1.5G as well. According to him, these factors, that include: a) age upon arrival, length of residence in the country of destination of the parents of immigrant children; b) family background in the country of origin, including parent's educational and economic status; c) the quality of the school in the country of origin; d) educational and occupational aspirations of parents for their children; e) sanctions supporting school success (from both the ethnic community and individual families); f) individual abilities and skills (hours spent on homework, extracurricular activities ect.); g) respect for teachers and trust in the school system; h) availability of school services in particular supporting the learning of the Italian language; i) parental and community involvement and support in the school system; j) peer group support in promoting academic success (McCarthy, 1998, p. 29-30).

This study was focused on the analyze of school performance and academic achievement of 1.5G of Albanian immigrants in correlation with:

- (a) parents support and educational - occupational aspirations for their children.
- (b) Reaction against stigma toward immigrants
- (c) socio-economic status and the professional achievement of 1.5G Albanian immigrants after graduation

Let's have a look to this issues:

*(a) The influence of parents support and their educational - occupational aspirations about their children on the school performance and academic achievement of 1.5G of Albanian immigrants.*

The most consistent predictors of children's academic achievement and social adjustment are parent expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school. Parents of high-achieving students set higher standards for their children's educational activities than parents of low-achieving students (Clark ,1990).

As far as education is concerned, most migrants who enter Italy are not poorly educated or from rural areas, but either middle-class or highly-educated people from large cities. Data from different sources report that nearly 60 percent of first generation of immigrants have adequate schooling, there are wide differences in their proper job placement. In terms of occupational characteristics, 73 percent are registered as manual workers due to a combination of causes: recognition of their degrees with difficulties in comparing different schooling systems, which induce an under-evaluation of their education and difficulty of finding a job. Opportunities for migrants in Italy are at the lowest occupational level even for the highly-educated ones. Thus, highly-educated migrants are either unemployed or work in undeclared and occasional jobs to an extent even greater than poorly-educated ones (Reyneri, 2004).

Their children; the 1.5 or second-generation, has generally managed to overcome the obstacles posed to their parents; such as linguistic and cultural issues, better enabling them to integrate into and move up the socio-economic ladder of host.

Regardless the educational level of the parents who are immigrants of first generation, it is evident that Albanian parents give help and support to their children at least financially, for their school progress. This because many of



them consider the future of their children as the main motive for having migrated to Italy. They encourage their children to have good results at school because they see school as medium who gives people better chances for finding well paid and more prestigious jobs.

*I have not had the chance to follow the university studies in Albania, but I would like very much to do so. During the communism regime only a child from the family has the right to follow University and in my family, my big brother studied at university and I couldn't. I worked as a technician at the Radio-Television factory in Durrës, but I would like to be an engineer. When my husband and I decided to migrate to Italy, we thought about the future of our children. I saw Italy as a country where at least my children would have the chance to have a good education and nobody could prohibit them to follow the university. So I motivated my children to have good school achievements and today both of them have finished the university studies in the branches they desired. (Shqipe, female 53, living in Brescia).*

But immigrant parents face many difficulties on supporting their children at school.

A very important factor for good educational achievement is the transmission of knowledge from parents to children. As already Coleman (1988) demonstrated in his famous article, it is a strong advantage when parents can give educational and psychological support to their children during their studies (helping them with home works). It is not sufficient that parents have a high human capital but that they transmit their knowledge to their children. Hence, this will foster the achievement of their human capital which is very important for future achievements in the labor market. But immigrant parents tend to have less Italian language ability and education and they face difficulties on helping their children at home.

According to Perreira, foreign-born parents' income level partially determines their ability to provide better resources for their children's academic attainment. For example, some immigrant parents lack transportation to take their sons and daughters to extracurricular and

community activities (Perreira et al., 2006). In contrast with their middle-class peers, many low income children of immigrants lack computers and internet access (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008). In particular, because many immigrant parents work long hours in inflexible low-wage jobs, they are often unavailable to attend school meetings during the day or help their children after school with homework (ibid.).

*(b) The reaction against stigma toward immigrants as a way for good school performance and academic achievement of 1.5G of Albanian immigrants.*

Another reason which motivates 1.5G of Albanian immigrants for having good school performance and academic achievement is the reaction against stigma toward immigrants. According to Goffman (1963, p. 3), stigma is an attribute that extensively discredits an individual, reducing him or her “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” Most stigma scholars regard stigma as a social construction—a label attached by society—and point to variability across time and cultures in what attributes, behaviors, or groups are stigmatized (Crocker et al. 1998, Jones et al. 1984).

From the interviews results is clear that in many cases Albanian students react against local stigma toward immigrants, *by challenging this stigma.*

*“I tried to show to the Italians that Albanian is a clever person, honest, hard-worker and can have good school achievements as an Italian. It is not important were are you from but were you go...!” (Florida, female 30, living in Ancona)*

*(c) The gap between school performance and academic achievement of 1.5G Albanian immigrants and their socio-economic status and professional achievement after graduation.*

As showed in the methodology 19 form 43 interviewed people were immigrants of 1.5 generation from 20 to 30 years old. In the moment of migration they have been from 6 to 12 years old. So, as it can be seen they have more than 10 years living in the host country.

Many of them have started the educational process in the country of origin and have continued it in the host country. The interruption of process of

socialization is a very important moment on this generation of migrants lives who illustrate their challenges comparing to the second generation of migrants (children who was born in the host country and have not had interruption in the socialization process). From 19 interviewed people from 1.5G of Albanian migration, 13 have a university diploma and 6 of them have finished the secondary education in Italy. These data show a tendency for good educational achievement of 1.5 G of Albanian migration in Italy. But the educational achievement is only a part of the whole professional achievement. Having a "Laurea" does not mean being successful in the professional field of work. The empirical study showed a tendency that only a small part of 1.5G of Albanian immigrants work as professionals in the field of their university background. From the interviews some reasons who explain this situation have been listed:

(i) According to the interviewed people, the difficulty to find a job in the field of their education has to do with the "economical global crises" (which has influenced even Italy) and not directly with the fact of being an Albanian or not.

*I have been graduated on communication sciences four years ago, but I have not find a job in accordance with my study background. So I work as a cashier at a Shopping mall. I consider my self lucky, at least I have a job. I know many people who do not have a monthly salary. This because of the economical crises, not because they are Albanians, Chinese's or Serbs( Klajdi, male 22, living in Brescia)*

(ii) Some of them consider stigma toward foreigners as un important obstacle to find a job in accordance with their professional education. Italians are afraid that migrants working in the formal or informal economy could become competitive, thus "stealing" their jobs (Del Bocca & Venturini, 2005). Studies report that Albanians persist among the foreign groups most strongly stereotyped and stigmatized by native-born Italians.

*I have been graduated on Economy/Bank-Finance branch. When I made an interview at a bank for a place of work, I saw that the person who interviewed me, gave importance to the fact that I'was an Albanian. He asked*

*me about the Italian language abilities, the relationship with locals or with other Albanians, family background etc. There were 5 foreigners and 2 Italians who applied for that place of work and we learned that it was hired one of the Italians.( Klodi, male 29, living in Pisa)*

(iii) Some others consider the field of their study inconvenient for the working trade requests. According to them, this is the main reason why they don't find a job in accordance with their professional education. Looking that females are more oriented from the social sciences comparing to males, and looking that the working trade is not oriented toward these sciences, females immigrants face more difficulties on finding a job in accordance with their field of studies than males who are oriented mostly by the exact sciences.

*I have been graduated on political sciences, but what to do with it? I think I have chosen the wrong field of study. Is this the reason why I have difficulties to find a job in accordance with my background.(Denisa, female 27, living in Bologna)*

As we can see from the interviews the 1.5G Albanian immigrants, there is a gap between their educational achievement and the opportunities for finding a job in accordance with their background. Many of interviewed people think that Italian society doesn't create good chances and opportunities for inter-generational social mobility, as a result just a small number of members of 1.5G Albanian immigrations have a better status comparing to their parents.

According to Laura Zanfrini (2006) although in recent years the entrance in the labor market for the first generation of migrants has a changed (not always in bad jobs), the 'intergenerational transmission of the disadvantage's from father to son/daughter has not disappeared. The difference between the first and the second generation is that the children of immigrant don't feel anymore host but citizens. Hence, they have different and more ambitious expectations than their parents who accepted an occupation at the lowest level of the occupational hierarchy. Unfortunately, the ambitions of

second generation often have to tackle with strong discrimination in the labor market.

### **Conclusions:**

The study showed that Albanian immigrants see school achievement as a medium for upward inter-generational mobility.

The study show a correlation between the educational achievement of 1.5 G of Albanian immigrants and: (a) parents support and educational - occupational aspirations about their children. (b) stigma against immigrants (c) the socio-economic status and the professional achievement of 1.5G Albanian immigrants after graduation.

First, Albanian immigrant parents give a very strong support to their children in order to create to them the opportunities to success in life and to be more integrated in the host society. Where the example of 1.5 generation of Albanian immigrants is taken, parents claim that one of the major reason for their migration have been the future of their children.

Second, the study also showed that many Albanian immigrants of 1.5 generation try to challenge the negative social stigma toward the immigrants, by making efforts to have good educational achievement and having good results in school.

Third, although there is an evidence of good school achievement of 1.5 G of Albanian immigrants, there is a gap between the school achievements and labor market, so many Albanian graduated students don't work in accordance with their educational background in Italy, so the process of upward inter-generational mobility, which started during the educational process, stop in this phase of their life.

As a conclusion many immigrants of 1.5 generation work in manual works as they parents and the 'intergenerational transmission of the disadvantage's from father to son/daughter" does not disappear.

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